

Title: The Politics of Life and Death: Nikolai Levin and Radicalism in “Anna Karenina”
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Abstract:

Tolstoy engages with a staggering number of social, political, and economic theories and ideologies in the course of *Anna Karenina*. While scholars have extensively studied the ideological content of Tolstoy's novel, the ideology of Nikolai Levin, Konstantin Levin's nihilist older brother, is an understudied issue in scholarship on *Anna Karenina*. Nikolai Levin's presence only spans approximately 40 pages of the 800 page novel, yet he advances the most systematic ideology in the novel and presents the strongest intellectual challenges to Konstantin Levin. Nikolai Levin's brand of *narodnichestvo* is an ideological outlier in Tolstoy's novel, but represents an important link to anti-nihilist literature of the mid 19th century. The anti-nihilist theme appears in several of Tolstoy's earlier works, most notably his plays *Zarazhennoe semeistvo* (1864) and *Nigilist* (1866). These earlier works are an important to understanding the genesis of Nikolai Levin, and provide a clear link between Tolstoy's works and the anti-nihilist works of Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Leskov, and others. This goal of this paper is to examine Nikolai Levin and his ideology as they appear in *Anna Karenina* and how they relate to other important anti-nihilist texts. The paper will focus on three aspects common to nihilist characters: political ideology, social behavior, and the critique of the family. In examining these character types, we will see that Tolstoy draws upon popular tropes of contemporary literature but modifies them significantly to function within the larger ideological framework of *Anna Karenina*.